



Landscape Architects
Technical Committee

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SELECTING A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

for Public Sector Projects

SELECTING A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

We often do not recognize the work of landscape architects because it never occurs to us to look. Although the landscape is visible, its design and the design process often are not. Therefore, the selection of a design consultant is an extremely important task, one that should be fair and defensible to the public, and the outcome of an objective process that identifies the most qualified firm.

Clear differences exist between landscape architecture and other design professions. Architects primarily design buildings and structures for specific uses, such as houses, offices, schools and factories. Civil engineers typically apply technical scientific knowledge to the design of city infrastructures such as roads, bridges, and public utilities. Landscape architects offer an essential array of talent and expertise to plan and design the built environment.

Why a Landscape Architect?

Landscape architecture is one of the most diverse design fields. A landscape architect is knowledgeable in the physical and life sciences as well as the art of design and principles of construction. In addition to the better known arenas of parks, streetscapes, and public plazas, landscape architects are trained in visual quality assessment, public facilitation and mediation, environmental impact studies, wetlands mitigation, urban design, historic preservation, large and small scale master planning, erosion control, and landscape water management.

In addition to technical design, landscape architects incorporate social and behavioral elements throughout the entire design process. Training in social sciences (such as behavioral psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics) allow them to bring a human dimension to their designs. They are skilled in evaluating existing environments, environmental perceptions, and the effects of environments on people. By combining technical science and a design background with advanced training in social sciences, landscape architects are adept at planning for special needs populations, such as children, the elderly or the disabled.



Landscape architects perform professional work in planning and design of the land for human use and benefit. Based on analysis of environmental, physical and social characteristics, and economic considerations, they produce overall guidelines, reports, master plans, conceptual plans, and detail designs, and provide construction oversight for landscape projects. By including landscape architects in a wider range of projects, public agencies ensure a broader perspective on how a project may be addressed.

The following definitions describe services and the role landscape architects can play in public sector projects:

Visual Analysis

Many public projects - including buildings or structures, powerline corridors, landfills, highway or mass transit alignments, and parks and open space, visually impact the surrounding areas or vistas from significant public viewpoints. Landscape architects assess the visual impacts of various solutions using techniques ranging from simple sketches to sophisticated computer imaging.

Public Facilitation and Mediation

Designing a participatory community outreach program is increasingly becoming a part of obtaining project approvals. This is especially important when users and uses may change over the life of a project. Landscape architects with strong graphic and communication skills can analyze user needs and integrate them into creative solutions that also meet other project objectives. Furthermore, landscape architects can facilitate the public input process by preparing press releases, conducting public meetings, and documenting the outcomes of such input.

Historic Preservation

Historic preservation ranges from research and documentation of historic plans and gardens to renovations in a manner consistent with historic themes. It also includes the integration of new work to complement historic elements.

Site Planning

Site planning could involve the evaluation of alternative sites as well as the layout of a series of established program elements in a specific site. Site planning components may include pedestrian circulation, parking, conformance to accessibility requirements, entries and exits, recreational facilities, service areas, or a variety of residential, retail and commercial architectural elements. Working within the prescribed budget and physical constraints of the land and surrounding land uses, the landscape architect strives to find the best solution from both a practical and aesthetic point of view.



Master Planning

Master planning is the arrangement of program uses over a long time period within the constraints of site and budget. Master plans are decision-making tools that provide framework within which to evaluate program or project changes. The plans are dynamic documents that must be updated as public policy, economic conditions, or project opportunities change.

Environmental Planning

Landscape architects often lead a team of specialists to assess the environmental conditions of a natural resource area and develop proposals for the preservation, mitigation, or combined development and preservation of an environmentally sensitive area.

Design

Design encompasses many areas of expertise. Generally, the services include conceptual design, construction documents (bid or contract documents), and construction observation and administration (to ensure compliance with the design intent and quality specified) of such items as planting, paving, lighting, recreational facilities, small non-habitable structures, signage, site furnishings, fountains, irrigation, grading, drainage, erosion control measures, and other similar work.

Team Management

The broad backgrounds of landscape architects allow them to understand a variety of issues and related professions, making them valuable leaders and facilitators of multidisciplinary teams of consultants. Such teams ensure that design creativity and technical rigor are united and balanced.

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Urban Design

Urban design addresses the complex, interrelated issues that arise in city and suburban environments that accommodate commercial, retail, and residential uses along with mass transit, automobile and pedestrian circulation, and infrastructure. Urban design is the search for physical design solutions that comply with zoning laws and development agreements, respect neighborhood concerns, and address a range of social and economic demands. The outcome of such work includes development guidelines, specific plans, or other documents which help direct the development, or redevelopment of an area.

Construction Management

While public agencies typically provide construction management services (day to day oversight and inspection), landscape architects may also provide these services (independently or adjunct to staff) to ensure that project implementation complies with the construction documents. A landscape architect may also coordinate bid processes, arbitrate change orders, resolve site and design issues, review payment requests, and administer schedules. Landscape architects may perform value engineering to determine the best process or materials to use over the life of a project. Furthermore, landscape architects can also perform constructibility reviews on proposed project plans and specifications.

Post Construction

Landscape architects can evaluate site problems and design issues including state mandated landscape water management, drainage, and maintenance concerns. They can develop management plans, maintenance and operation guidelines and cost projections to assure continued success of a project.

Staff Assistance - Plan Review

Landscape architects can support public agency staff in reviewing development plans and construction documents for conformance with city policy and standards and provide graphic materials for public presentations.

Selecting a Landscape Architect

Section 4526 of the California Government Code mandates that local agencies, including cities, counties, schools and special districts, use a qualification-based selection (QBS) process in procuring professional design services. This requirement has long been the official public policy in state and federal design contracts. It means that public agencies cannot solicit a price proposal as part of the selection process. Once the agency has selected the design consultant deemed best qualified to carry out the project, the agency and consultant then negotiate an agreement. If agreement on the scope of service and/or compensation cannot be reached, negotiations with the first ranked firm are terminated, and negotiations are opened with the second ranked firm.

Five key areas of preparation will help ensure a successful selection process.

Determine what is needed and write a clear, concise request that includes the following information:

- ◆ **Clarify the goals of the project.** Describe the intended goals, whose goals they are, and the key issues.
- ◆ **Who is the client?** Define to whom the firm will report (contact person), how the decision-making process will work, timelines, what the lines of communication are and how the consultants will receive approvals.
- ◆ **Project background.** Describe the location of the project, the type of work envisioned, funding sources and requirements, and the project's history, if applicable. Collect maps and any other pertinent site information (photos, articles, project program).
- ◆ **Define the services required.** Be as specific as possible. Make provisions for firms to submit additional services they think may be helpful, but be sure they are described separately.





- ◆ **Determine deliverables.** Be very clear about the end product expected and timelines for such deliverables.

Research the market. Research the firms in your area to determine their specialties and contact only those which specialize in the services being requested. Consider advertising in appropriate newspapers and periodicals.

Develop a clear selection process. Emphasize the knowledge, skills, and abilities which will lead to a successful project.

Set a realistic budget. Review the scope of service to ensure consistency with the project and stated goals.

Consider utilizing a landscape architect, or other design professional, to help in the preparation of a program statement, defining the project scope and budget and to develop selection criteria. However, when consulting with such professionals, be clear about whether they can also submit a bid for the project.

There are three basic methods for selecting a design firm. The following guidelines may be helpful in determining which method to use.

1. Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

The RFQ process is suitable for projects that are more complex or require a team of professionals. An RFQ is also a good way to identify a short list of firms with directly relevant experience and skills before requesting proposals and interviews.

The RFQ provides background information from select or open list firms. Because most firms have already developed this information, they can respond to an RFQ with relatively little time and expense. Conversely, the selector can evaluate a

standard set of criteria very quickly, narrow the list (generally to three to five firms) and then embark on interviews or ask for a more detailed approach to the project.

2. Request for Proposal (RFP)

RFPs are valuable because they require specificity in both the submission and proposed work program. An RFP should be used when the approach to the project or the design process is a key element in the selection of a firm or team. Similarly, if a project addresses a complex set of issues, the RFP is an excellent method for selecting a qualified firm.

In order to make the RFP process work well remember several key elements:

- ◆ **Request only qualified firms.** Firms should not be asked to spend time and money responding to an RFP if they are not qualified to perform the contract. Research the firms in your area ahead of time and limit requests. This will save review time and let agencies focus on a few key proposals.
- ◆ **Be clear about objectives.** While the work program or the exact services needed may be uncertain, be clear about the project's intended goals, and more importantly, its product.
- ◆ **Be fair in the request.** Preparing a proposal is a major investment on a firm's part, including staff time, printing and site visits. Ask for a reasonable number of copies (5 is considered fair) and request a scope of service and response that is consistent with available fees. Consider the responsibilities associated with reviewing submittals.

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- ◆ **Be available to answer questions.** No matter how well written the RFP, something will likely need clarification. To get the best response, someone knowledgeable about the project must be accessible to responding firms. Consider holding a pre-proposal meeting so that everyone has an opportunity to see the project, hear the goals first-hand, and ask questions. Specify a period when questions may be submitted and distribute the answers after a cut-off date, but still a week or two in advance of the due date.
- ◆ **Interviews.** Interviews are a valuable step in this process because they permit staff to become acquainted with the design team. Be courteous by limiting the number of firms invited to an interview. Remember that interviews are non-billable time for consultants.
- ◆ **Be willing to learn from the process.** As a courtesy, debrief all firms that submit a proposal. This need not be more than a short phone call, but it allows firms to understand where they misunderstood the RFP, or where they may need to increase their skills in the future. This step may also enable a contracting agency to clarify its own goals and may even give valuable insight on how to improve the process in the future.

3. Competitions

Due to the expense and time involved in conducting a competition, this is not a commonly used method of selecting a design consultant. However, competitions are valuable when a project is highly visible or extremely difficult, requiring an unusually creative solution. It is important to provide incentives or awards for the competing individuals and/or firms which will make their efforts worthwhile.

- ◆ **Prepare a quality request.** Just like an RFP, a quality "Call for Entries" and information packet will provide better solutions. Avoid over-standardizing the submission requirements. Specific requirements for submission size, number of entry pieces and one or two common view-points (plan, section, etc.) should be sufficient. Avoid overly restrictive limits on type of media, number of words, views, or sketches.
- ◆ **Hire a technical advisor.** Someone trained in the profession who has been through the competition process will be invaluable in preparing the Call for Entries, establishing the submission requirements and setting the criteria for awards.
- ◆ **Establish a qualified jury.** People with a vested interest in the project may be valuable, but be sure to include objective jury members who can review entries relative to the issues and evaluate solutions on the objective basis of design quality, suitability and effectiveness.



Landscape Architecture Contract Requirements

As required by the California Business and Professions Code section 5616, any licensed landscape architect who agrees to provide professional services shall provide every client with a detailed written contract. The written contract shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- (a) A description of services to be provided by the landscape architect to the client.
- (b) A description of any basis of compensation applicable to the contract, including the total price that is required to complete the contract, and method of payment agreed upon by both parties.
- (c) A notice which reads: "Landscape architects are licensed by the State of California."
- (d) The name, address, and license number of the landscape architect and the name and address of the client.
- (e) A description of the procedure that the landscape architect and client will use to accommodate additional services.

Elements not specifically required that would be helpful include:

- ◆ Clarification of who pays sub-consultant fees if they are required
- ◆ The title and address of the landscape project
- ◆ A statement that the landscape architect needs written approval before proceeding with the next phase of work
- ◆ A schedule of when and in what amounts all fees must be paid including the payment at termination of the project
- ◆ A procedure for either party to terminate the contract before design services are completed and a procedure for handling disputes between parties should the need arise
- ◆ Clarification of who owns the landscape architectural documents

State Oversight of Landscape Architects

California has over 3,000 licensed landscape architects. State statutes and regulations for this profession are contained in the Landscape Architects Practice Act (Business and Professions Code sections 5615 to 5683 and the California Code of Regulations sections 2600 to 2680).

These statutes and regulations are administered by the Landscape Architects Technical Committee (LATC) of the California Architects Board (CAB) within the State Department of



Consumer Affairs (DCA). The CAB has the power, duty, and authority to investigate alleged violations.

The Board takes disciplinary action against landscape architects, which may include license revocation or suspension, civil penalty citations, civil injunctions, and/or referral to local district attorneys for criminal prosecution, for:

- ◆ Fraud in obtaining a license
- ◆ Impersonation; use of an assumed or other licensee's name
- ◆ Aiding unlawful practice
- ◆ Signing others' plans
- ◆ Permitting misuse of name
- ◆ Fraud in the practice of landscape architecture
- ◆ Negligence or misconduct
- ◆ Incompetency or recklessness

Inquiries regarding the Landscape Architects Practice Act, licensure as a landscape architect, or questions concerning or complaints against any licensee should be directed to the:

Landscape Architects Technical Committee

400 R Street, Suite 4000

Sacramento, CA 95814

Telephone: (916) 445-4954

E-Mail: latc@dca.ca.gov

Web: www.latc.dca.ca.gov



This guide was prepared with an emphasis on public sector needs. Consumer Guidelines for Private or Residential Projects are also available through the LATC.